

"Most People See That The UK Is A Lot Better Off Within The EU"

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Do you think the EU and the United Kingdom will have parted ways until 2023?

In the end, I don't think so. If you talk to responsible and well-informed people in civil society, at the universities, in business, most people see very clearly that the UK is a lot better off within the EU. Unfortunately we have a political class that largely seems to lack these insights. They don't seem to understand the most basic notions of how international relations and negotiations work. Also, we have a press deeply hostile to European integration, largely owned by people not based in the UK that pursues its own particular agenda, that is persistently telling blatant lies about the EU. The Leveson Report into the culture, practice and ethics of the press is full of evidence for this.

How could the scenario of UK leaving the EU unfold?

The next significant electoral milestone in the UK will be the European Parliament elections in 2014. It's expected that the fiercely anti-European United Kingdom Independence Party will do extremely well. UKIP will win at least a third of the seats in England, maybe even half of them. That's what Tory politicians are thinking about when they play around with this idea of promising a referendum after the next general election, which will be in 2015. But there is one thing that makes things difficult, and that is the referendum on Scottish independence, which will be held in late 2014.

How do these elections interact?

Some people think, and I think that is a plausible notion, that the decision of Scottish voters will be affected not so much by whether or not the next election will lead to the UK leaving the EU, but by visceral feelings amongst the Scottish electorate about there is going to be another Tory government. If it looks likely that there will be a Tory majority in 2015, that might well affect the way people vote in the Scottish referendum quite substantially.

How, and why?

What appears to be a fairly widespread hatred of Tories was developed very strongly since the 1980s in Scotland. That was partly because of the notion that the Tories have just become very much an English party. Historically, the Conservatives were really strong in Scotland, they used to get more than 50 percent of the popular vote in the 1950s and well into the 60s, I think. When the first European Parliament elections were held in 1979, there were more Tory MEPs in Scotland than from any other party. Now, there is only one, and even that is because there is a proportional

system. If it were a majority system based on constituencies there probably wouldn't be any Tory MEPs in Scotland at all. There is only one MP out of 59 in Scotland at present. Anyway, if a Tory majority at the general elections in 2015 appears likely that that will push Scottish voters to look a lot more sympathetically at independence.

Would the expectation of the UK leaving the EU play a role for the decision of the Scots on independence, too?

It would play on people's mind, I guess. It would certainly play on my mind. But a referendum on leaving the EU will only take place for sure if the Tories win a majority. A coalition government or a Labour government would probably not risk a referendum, although the pressure to be seen to take note of popular anti-EU sentiment by conceding a referendum may be very strong.

Is this anti-EU sentiment mostly an English issue?

Polls don't show necessarily more pro-European opinion in Wales and Scotland than in England. Nonetheless, UKIP is perceived as decidedly English in orientation and doesn't have any electoral traction outside of England. Nor will it win any seats in Scotland (or Wales).

What if the Tories lose and the exit perspective fades into distance again? Do you expect the British will finally make their peace with EU membership at some point?

That doesn't entirely depend on the British, does it? The British referendum will not take place until 2015. That's two and a half years from now. By that time the Euro zone may have crumbled. The UK doesn't necessarily have to be the catalyst for a breakup.

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Die Fragen stellte Maximilian Steinbeis. Das Interview wurde vor der Rede von Premierminister Cameron über Europa geführt. Nächste Folge: [Ulrich K. Preuß](#) präsentiert eine düstere Vision eines "fragmentierten" Europa 2023.

